



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Hantavirus

What Is <i>Hantavirus</i>?	<p>Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is rare in the US and the chances of becoming infected are low; only 20--50 cases of HPS have been confirmed annually in the United States since the disease was described in 1993. However, HPS is potentially deadly and immediate care is essential once symptoms appear.</p> <p>Hantavirus is not contagious from person to person in the United States. Rodents, such as mice and rats, carry the virus.</p>
What are the symptoms?	<p>Early symptoms include fatigue, fever and muscle aches, especially the large muscle groups—thighs, hips, back, sometimes shoulders. These symptoms are experienced by everyone who contracts the disease. There may also be headaches, dizziness, chills and/or abdominal problems, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. About half of all HPS patients experience these symptoms. Symptoms may develop between 1 and 5 weeks after exposure to potentially infected rodents and their droppings. Four to 10 days after the initial phase of illness, the late symptoms of HPS appear. These include coughing and shortness of breath as the lungs fill with fluid.</p>
How is <i>Hantavirus</i> treated?	<p>This disease is caused by a virus, so antibiotics are not effective.</p> <p>At the present time, there is no specific treatment for hantavirus infection. If you have been around rodents and have symptoms of fever, deep muscle aches and severe shortness of breath, see your doctor <i>immediately</i>. Be sure to tell your doctor that you have been around rodents—this will alert your physician to look closely for any rodent-carried disease such as HPS. If infected individuals are recognized early and are taken to an intensive care unit, the earlier, the better, they are more likely to survive. If a patient is experiencing full distress, it is less likely the treatment will be effective.</p>
How do people catch this disease?	<p>Hantavirus is not contagious from person to person in the United States. Hantaviruses are carried by rodents, especially the deer mouse. You can become infected by exposure to their droppings. Human infection occurs most commonly through the inhalation of aerosolized saliva or excreta. Hantavirus infection has been associated with the following situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing numbers of rodents in human dwellings; • Occupying or cleaning previously vacant cabins or other dwellings that are actively infested with rodents; • Cleaning barns and other outbuildings; • Disturbing excreta or rodent nests around the home or workplace; • Keeping captive wild rodents as pets; • Handling equipment or machinery that has been in storage; • Disturbing excreta in rodent-infested areas while hiking or camping; • Sleeping on the ground

What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?

Prevention is key for dealing with HPS. This means keeping rodents out of homes and workplaces, keeping away from rodents when camping or hiking, and cleaning up safely if you do find rodents. Here are some tips to help you prevent and reduce contact with rodents:

- Keep a clean home, especially the kitchen; wash dishes, clean counters and floor, keep food covered in rodent-proof containers.
- Keep a tight-fitting lid on garbage
- Discard uneaten pet food
- Set and keep spring-loaded rodent traps. Set traps near baseboards because rodents tend to run along walls and in tight spaces rather than out in the open.
- Set Environmental Protection Agency-approved rodenticide with bait under plywood or plastic shelter along baseboards. Follow product use instructions carefully, since rodenticides are poisonous to pets and people, too.
- Seal all entry holes ¼ inch wide or wider with lath screen or lath metal, cement, wire screening or other patching materials, inside and out.
- Clear brush, grass and junk from around house foundations to eliminate a source of nesting materials.
- Use metal flashing around the base of wooden, earthen or adobe homes to provide a strong metal barrier. Install so that the flashing reaches 12 inches above the ground and six inches down into the ground.
- Elevate hay, woodpiles and garbage cans to eliminate possible nesting sites. If possible, locate them 100 feet or more from your house.
- Trap rodents outside, too. Poisons or rodenticides may be used as well, but be sure to keep them out of the reach of children or pets.

To clean areas that have been infested with rodents, take these precautions:

Put on latex rubber gloves before cleaning up. Don't stir up dust by sweeping up or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials. Instead, [thoroughly wet](#) contaminated areas with detergent or liquid to deactivate the virus. Most general purpose disinfectants and household detergents are effective. You can also use a mixture of [1 and 1/2 cups of household bleach in 1 gallon of water](#) in place of commercial disinfectant. When using the chlorine solution, avoid spilling the mixture on clothing or other items that may be damaged. Once everything is wet, take up contaminated materials with a damp towel, then mop or sponge the area with disinfectant. Spray dead rodents with disinfectant, then double-bag along with all cleaning materials and bury or burn—or throw out in appropriate waste disposal system. If burning or burying isn't feasible, contact your local or state health department about other disposal methods. Finally, disinfect gloves before taking them off with disinfectant or soap and water. After taking off the clean gloves, thoroughly wash hands with soap and warm water.